DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 251 EC 302 984

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TITLE Inclusionary Programs for Children with Language and/or Learning Disabilities: Issues in Teacher Readiness.
PUB DATE 4 Dec 93
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Inservice Teacher Education; Knowledge Level; *Language Impairments; *Learning Disabilities; *Mainstreaming; Preservice Teacher Education; *Regular and Special Education Relationship; Remedial Instruction; Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Inclusive Schools

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses issues identified in a survey of regular teachers needing to implement classroom-based remediation programs for children with language and/or learning disabilities. Sixteen teachers from two states completed open-ended surveys and participated in follow-up interviews. The survey examined their opinions concerning the inclusion of these children in full-day classroom programs. All the teachers expressed a concern that they have been given additional responsibilities without the necessary technical and administrative supports. Teachers were most concerned about: (1) their lack of knowledge about specific language/learning disabilities; (2) their unmet need for modeling of effective teaching strategies and collaboration with special education teachers; and (3) their lack of planning time and paraprofessional help. Additionally, teachers reported a lack of information about the child's needs. However, teachers also reported discovering that these children could be successful in the classroom and that the inclusion policy had led to expansion of their teaching methods. Implications for preservice and inservice training needs are drawn. An appendix includes the survey questions. (Contains 14 references.) (DB)

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Running Heading: INCLUSIONARY PROGRAMS

EC 302 984

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Inclusionary Programs for Children with Language and/or Learning Disabilities: Issues in Teacher Readiness

The term "inclusion," as it is used by school educators, refers to the incorporation of children with various types and degrees of disabilities into the regular classroom. It is the application of the principles originally proposed as the "regular education initiative," advocating reform of the dual system of special and regular programs for children with and without disabilities toward educational integration for all children in the same classroom. Inclusion differs from "mainstreaming" in that it originally places the child in the classroom with "pull-out" or "pull-aside" services provided when necessary; whereas, mainstreaming reverses the order of integration, originally placing the child in a resource setting and then including him/her in classes deemed appropriate by a special education team.

In this study it is argued that in the wake of research-supported initiatives on the part of special education departments to implement classroom-based remediation programs for children with language and/or learning disabilities (L/LD), many teachers are left unsure of their roles in these programs and are often resistant to accommodating their teaching methods to the special needs of inclusionary students in their classrooms. Our interest was in defining the most consistent areas of concern for teachers having inclusionary students in their classrooms and the aspects of program implementation that

had contributed to positive experiences for teachers in this study. We felt that as members of the teaching staffs and special education departments of our respective schools and, therefore, as members of the teams working to integrate the special children into the classroom, we could gain their trust through our mutual interest in helping the new programs to operate smoothly. We explained to them that their honest input would eventually help us to be more responsive to their questions about the children, their struggles with adapting curriculum, and their frustrations with program organization.

Theoretical Perspective

Recent research studies have uncovered flaws in the rationale supporting separate programming for children with L/LD. In the long view, these isolated resource programs alone have been inadequate and ineffective in providing improved and lasting growth in specific educational skill levels due to the fragmentation in the system (Will, 1986; Wang et al, 1984). In its place, newer views of educational organization, supported by a social constructionist theory of learning, have turned these models around, revealing the social, emotional, and academic advantages of having children with disabilities remain in the classroom for as much time as possible with only minimal or consultative help from special education personnel (Phillips et al, 1990; Wang et al., 1986). Backed by legislative mandates supporting inclusionary education, such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the

Rehabilitation Act, and ACT 230, schools have begun to open their regular education classrooms to children who would have been excluded in the past.

As schools incorporate inclusionary principles into the delivery of special education services, the role of the classroom teacher in the collaborative effort to accommodate or modify the curriculum for these children's optimal learning experiences has grown.. These programs have generally met with resistance from regular educators who felt that they lacked the "will and skill" to address these children's education in the regular classroom (Friend & Bauwens, 1988; Margolis & McGettigan,1988; Phillips et al., 1990). Studies utilizing teacher interviews have revealed the presence of perceived obstacles (Davis, 1989; Lobosco & Newman, 1992; Michael, 1993) and initial biases about the inclusionary students' behaviors (Conway, 1989; Dukes & Saudergas, 1989). Many teachers were not convinced of the educational value of inclusionary education (O'Reilly & Duquette, 1988), while others found their negative reactions transformed into positive experiences after being involved in the programs (Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Adelman, & Schattman, 1993). We can hardly ignore the important role played by teacher expectations in classroom dynamics and learning experiences for all students (Stanovitch, 1986).

Methodology

Sixteen teachers from two states completed open-ended surveys and participated in follow-up interviews in their respective schools. The classroom teachers had an average of

eight years of prior teaching experience (1-20 years) and from to three years experience working with children with L/LD in the classroom full-day. Two schools served as bases for the study. Each school differed in organization: classes in the suburban school was limited to one grade level, classes in the rural school were multigrade (two age levels). The interviewers included a speech/language pathologist and a special education resource specialist, based in the schools and able to provide reliable "inside" observations about the existing classroom dynamics and the challenges that inclusion offers these teachers. The focus of this research study was limited to children with mild to moderate L/LD, i.e., difficulties with language, reading, math, and/or writing abilities that fall at least 1.5 standard deviations below age or grade-appropriate academic functioning.

Each classroom teacher completed an open-ended questionaire to survey their opinions concerning the inclusion of children with L/LD in full-day classroom programs. The questions were meant to serve as a guide for the teachers to organize their impressions of program organization, classroom implementation, and program improvement. An oral interview and discussion followed the survey several days later, allowing the teachers to expand upon their original answers. Qualitative descriptions of the inclusion students, the inclusion model that was used, the instructional methods generally used by the teacher, and classroom characteristics accompanied each questionaire.

Conclusions

All the teachers interviewed expressed a concern that along with the new development of inclusionary programs, they have been given new added responsibilities for educating all the children in their classes without the necessary technical and administrative supports they felt were necessary. The most consistent areas of concern perceived by the teachers centered around three issues: they did not feel that they had an adequate knowledge base about specific language/learning disabilities to understand the children's problems, they asked for modeling of effective teaching strategies and collaboration with special education teachers to change their teaching methods and adapt curriculum appropriately, and they were limited in sufficient planning time and para-professional help with classroom management to accomplish all the goals they had set for themselves. In each of these areas the teachers had well-founded objections to various aspects of the process in which the new inclusionary programs were being implemented.

Teachers referred to not knowing the extent of the trouble each child had in coping with classroom tasks. That is, not enough information was provided for them to anticipate academic difficulties. Most of the teachers commented that they did not have access to all the important documents that describe the children, such as the Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) that summarizes the children's problems and sets goals for the school year, and previous progress reports, nor did they understand the processes contributing to the child's academic

difficulties. The teachers were also concerned that they lacked the training in special education that would have helped them to better deal with specific students' problems. Although it was explained to them that many of the same strategies that are used for regular education students are appropriate for students with L/LD with individual modifications, they felt special training in the form of inservice meetings or extra coursework would have better prepared them for accommodating the curriculum in meaningful ways.

All the teachers surveyed indicated that they felt having children with L/LD in their classes required extra planning time to provide for individual accommodations in written and oral forms and to consult with the paraprofessionals. A large number of these teachers explained that this time was not provided for them or for their aides. Although the aides were cooperative and helpful, they were not specifically trained to work with children with L/LD and the paraprofessionals then relied on direction from the teachers throughout the day, which was time-consuming. Most teachers commented in the follow-up portion of the study that the aides would be more of an asset if they, too, were trained to work with these children. For example, one teacher complained that "...our least educated people are being used to work with our neediest population."

These problems translated into teachers' perceptions of extra stress and added expectations on the part of school administrators. Real or perceived, these feelings were reflected in the teachers' evaluation of their own teaching performances

and efficacy. Most teachers were concerned about doing the best job possible.

In spite of their many negative concerns, teachers reported that there were positive outcomes to the new practice of inclusion. The aspects of program implementation that contributed most to positive experiences for the teachers were the discoveries that these children could be successful in the classroom, both in their well-deserved academic achievements and in their newly formed social relationships. Although the number of support personnel available to teachers was limited in number, the aides' help was still well appreciated by the teachers for providing an increase in the individual time that could be spent with special needs students, the additional input/advice for classroom accommodations, the extra adult contact made with all the children, and the availability of a helper for the recording of behaviors and observations during the day. As they reflected on their experiences, teachers felt that their teaching methods had been expanded, i.e., they began using a greater variety of activities and assessment tools, learned to accommodate different learning abilities, reviewed material more frequently, checked for students' comprehension more thoroughly, integrated the different subject lessons, taught to children's learning styles rather than the whole class, and used more peer-teaming methods. The teachers reported that the children with L/LD liked being in the class most of the day rather than being singled out for pull out programs. That is, the changes in classroom procedures and

teaching routines resulted in better educational opportunities for all the classroom children.

Implications

This study provides important information for school personnel, including regular education and special education staff members, administrators, and local, state and federal boards of education in organizing inclusionary programs for children with moderate language and/or learning disabilities. The legislative mandates have been in place for at least 10 years setting the necessary goals, the research literature has indicated a need for more integrated programming for special needs children, and the educational principles and practical suggestions for implementing these programs have been the subject of countless workshops and inservice programs. Still, teachers who are considered positive and progressive, i.e., the teachers we carefully chose for this study, have clearly expressed their frustration with the programs and their need for more inservice training, more support personnel, and more planning time.

Further education is needed for teachers in the areas of classroom organization and management, in accommodation of children's language and learning differences and styles, in learning how to best use support personnel for collaborative and team teaching methods, and in the interpretation of comprehensive evaluation reports and technical vocabulary as special needs children turn to them for help in the regular classroom learn a common vocabulary. Qualified support

personnel need to be made available to classroom teachers in order to assist them in educating all students so that valuable learning time is not taken away from any of the children. These support personnel need to be educated along with the teachers as to how best to manage the class. Further, collaboration among staff and support personnel needs to be ongoing, i.e., a part of the program. Teachers must be provided ample time to coordinate their plans for a successful program. At the administrative level, resources to support these important programs must be provided.

In summary, it seems clear that for inclusionary educational programs to be successful, administrative organizers and implementers need to provide early inservice presentations, trained and experienced para-professional support, and time allotments for planning and collaboration for all teachers that will be involved in the education of children with different learning abilities. Pre-service teacher education in using new models of classroom literacy instruction must include discussion of inclusionary programs. The teachers' understanding and support of different models of inclusionary programs will be determining factors in the success of these programs in the schools in the future.

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Appendix 1:
Survey Questions for Teachers

Program Information:

1. What model of inclusion do you follow in your classroom?
2. Do you fell that there's adequate support personnel to assist you in your program, i.e., aides, resource room teachers, or paraprofessionals?
3. How do you feel about support personnel being in your classroom, to help or to observe?
4. Do you feel there's adequate planning time allotted for your inclusion program?

Classroom Information:

1. How did you learn about the individual needs of the special students in your class (inclusionary, ACT 230)?
2. Have your teaching methods changed?
If yes, please describe the nature of any changes in your classroom procedures and your teaching routines.
3. Do you feel adequately prepared to meet the needs of all the students in your class?
4. What is the most difficult aspect of implementing inclusion in your classroom?

Program Evaluation:

1. What would you do differently to implement the program in your classroom?
2. What changes would you like to see implemented at the administrative level?
3. Is it your belief that students with language and/or learning disabilities benefit most from in-class adapted instruction or pull-out programming?
4. Has your attitude toward in-class instruction for children with language and/or learning disabilities changed following your experiences in the past months?

Thank you again for your cooperation.